

## **MeL Michigana: Buried Treasures Found!**

*by Kyle Kay Ripley*

A wealth of visual images and audio files found at MeL Michigana ([www.mel.org/michigana](http://www.mel.org/michigana)) can be a treasure trove for genealogists. Using the excellent quality images and audio files in this online collection enables researchers to enhance the richness of their family history, putting the activities of their ancestors in context with the social and political issues of the times of their lives. Over 50,000 items from a broad spectrum of libraries and historical institutions in Michigan are included in this free online collection. The Archives of Michigan Digital Collection, projects from the Making of Modern Michigan and Michigan County Histories from the University of Michigan comprise the majority of the content. In 2005, the Michigan Legislature allocated \$965,000 to the Library of Michigan for projects to "digitize materials currently in the possession of libraries in the state to preserve, store and make these digitized images accessible via the Michigan eLibrary." Ten libraries were recipients of the 2005 Digitization for Preservation and Access grants and their resulting projects are also part of MeL Michigana.

Images of genealogical interest in the Archives of Michigan digital collection include Civil War soldiers and service records, WPA property inventories, and death records. Currently these collections do not cover the entire state but more are continually being added. The Civil War Soldiers collection has almost 1,400 photos of identified and unidentified soldiers taken during the years of the Civil War. Service records may include muster rolls, enlistment and discharge papers. Over 2,000 images from the WPA property inventories include commercial and residential properties in Oakland, Jackson, Hillsdale and Isabella counties. The Archives digital collection of 1,043 death records includes Grand Traverse, Gratiot and Hillsdale counties.

The Making of Modern Michigan houses collections from 52 libraries comprising more than 4,500 subjects. Researchers will find images of newspapers as far back as the mid-1800's, indexes to newspapers, diaries, photos, oral histories, photographs, scrapbooks, funeral home obituaries, and much more. Examples of few highlights are selected materials from the Detroit Public Library's Burton Historical Collection and oral histories from Monroe County residents recounting their experiences in the Great Depression and World War II.

The Michigan Oral History Association's Oral History database contains nearly 4,000 audio files including interviews with Holocaust survivors, migrants, and Vietnam veterans.

The Michigan County Histories and Atlases collection is comprised of 428 digitized titles (many composed of multiple volumes) published before 1923. The collection offers all members of the community free keyword searching and page-by-page access to digitized reproductions of Michigan county histories and atlases as a resource for historical and genealogical research. Many of these images are also available on microfilm at various institutions within the state; the digitized images are more visually appealing and some may be printed at a size more practical for research documentation.

The Virtual Motor City collection from Wayne State University's Walter P. Reuther Library includes over 400 video newsreels and over 36,000 photos from the Detroit News.

The War of 1812 Digitization project from the Monroe County Library provides researchers looking for first hand experiences of soldiers with letters, memoirs and general historical accounts with emphasis on the Battle of the River Raisin in Frenchtown.

The Loutit District Library's Local History Interviews were produced in the 1980's and 1990's. They contain oral histories primarily from residents who lived in southwest Michigan during the early 1900's and later. Their accounts are of experiences in the Coast Guard, the fishing industry, shipping and more provide a personal insight to life along Lake Michigan.